

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 17 July 2017 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F J Rosamond (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs A R Berry,
Mrs C P Daw, Mrs G Doe, R J Dolley,
T G Hughes, Mrs B M Hull, F W Letch,
Mrs J Roach and T W Snow

Apologies

Councillor(s)

N A Way and J L Smith

Also Present

Councillor(s)

C J Eginton and Mrs M E Squires

Also Present

Officer(s):

Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Maria De Leiburne (Solicitor), Simon Newcombe (Public Health and Professional Services Manager), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

26 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr J L Smith who was substituted by Cllr R J Dolley and from Cllr N A Way who was substituted by Cllr F W Letch.

27 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Miss S Coffin, Templeton Parish Council, referring to item 8 on the agenda, said we wish to personally thank the Chairman for taking on this issue and the many Scrutiny Councillors who have shown our Parish Council and affected residents both compassion and assistance.

As this has now become such a large and complex issue, no longer just a case of bullying or nuisance by a bad neighbour and impossible to cover in 3 minutes, we have submitted a written representation to enable Councillors to review and inwardly digest.

I personally as Chairman am extremely proud of the way our tiny hamlet and Parish Council with its small group of affected residents have conducted themselves and ensured that at every stage, both in Planning and Environmental Health issues, your officers were given every assistance to enable them to make full choices.

We, as well as other well qualified and professional objectors, have researched and presented facts and theories, opinions and articles from those better informed and qualified to assist your officers to try and understand both the situation arising and the council's obligations and responsibilities.

We can do no more to assist this council and with the huge increase in traffic movements and digestate disposal that will follow the completion of two anaerobic digesters on the Willand site in September with further production capacity to follow over a two year period I fear the consequences to Mid Devon tourism and holiday trade.

I personally have no intention of shouting into deaf ears anymore; it is now up to you the elected Councillors of Scrutiny to take issue with your own officers as to whether your Council has fulfilled all its responsibilities in this matter.

The Chairman thanked Miss Coffin for her comments.

28 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Subject to changing the word 'arctic' to 'artic' on page six and changing 'Tiverton Pannier Market' to 'Market Walk Tiverton' under 'discussion took place regarding' on page 11, the minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

29 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet at its last meeting had been called in.

30 **MEMBER FORUM**

Cllr Roach raised concerns regarding the amount of money spent on agency workers. The Director of Corporate Affairs & Business Transformation informed Members that agency workers were used to cover periods of annual leave and sickness.

It was **AGREED** that a report be prepared for the next meeting of the Committee providing detail on the amount spent on agency staff and the reasons for this.

31 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reminded Members that there was a training session the following day and also advised them that he would be attending the open day at Red Linhay AD site that week.

32 **PROPOSED CLOSURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE SURGERIES IN CULLOMPTON AND CREDITON**

Cllr F W Letch had requested that the planned cessation of Customer First Surgeries that were held at Crediton and Cullompton, for four hours every other week, be discussed by the Committee.

Cllr Letch informed Members that he was a Town Councillor as well as a District Councillor and that wearing both hats could be difficult, however Crediton was at the centre of his heart and he considered that it was often forgotten. He reminded Members that on 31 March 2016 the Crediton office had been closed. The Town

Council had employed one of the ex-officers within their own office using funding from the authority. Cllr Letch said that he considered it essential that the District Council provided a service there. He did not agree that residents should be expected to use the internet or telephone to make contact and queried the need for face to face contact at Phoenix House if that were the case. Cllr Letch had received two letters of objection from local residents and when he had been in attendance, on what he was told was a 'quiet day', eleven people had been seen in the surgery. Many local residents were elderly and could not use the internet or telephone, which could often be confusing. Cllr Letch did not consider the Lords Meadow Leisure Centre to be an appropriate place for a public access computer as many people did not know where it was and it was not very easy to get to.

Cllr Letch read out a letter from a representative of the Crediton and District Access Group in which the author claimed that the most vulnerable would be affected, that there were logistical difficulties in getting to Tiverton for a face to face appointment and that the residents of Crediton would not be receiving an equal service. Cllr Letch proposed downsizing the level of service in Tiverton to enable an increase of service in Cullompton and Crediton.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Consultation that had taken place the previous year;
- Local people might not be confident in the use of technology or the telephone;
- Cuts in service to the Citizens Advice and Age Concern who had provided support in the past;
- People that had difficulties using IT could get support from friends or family;
- The need to move towards digital channels to save money and reduce the number of staff required to answer phones or deal with face to face enquiries;
- Many residents in rural areas had no local access to an office and already had to travel or use digital methods of contact;
- A campaign from the Crediton Courier had only resulted in one complaint;
- Rural Broadband.

The Director of Corporate Affairs & Business Transformation provided the following information which was tabled:

Crediton and Cullompton fortnightly Surgeries

Visitor numbers 2016/17	Visitor numbers	Average customers per hour	Average seen per officer per hour	Cost to serve per
Tiverton	32,622	26ph	6	£13.57ph
Crediton	359	4ph	4	£20.35ph
Cullompton	152	2ph	2	£18.09ph

Reason for the decision

- As part of a decision to rationalise council services, the Council withdrew from buildings in Cullompton and Crediton on 1st April 2016.
- When the full time service ended last year the staff resource was removed from the Customer First (CF) budget.
- Since then, officers had provided a fortnightly 'surgery' in those locations to ease the transition and to continue to make use of the available IT connections until those ceased.
- With the IT connection stopping in August, the decision was made to cease the surgeries as these could not be justified when officers were simply signposting people to the internet or providing telephone numbers to access services rather than being able to 'do any business' on-site.
- As this was the final element of implementing the 2016 decision, not a further change, additional consultation was not carried out, but advance notification of the changes occurred in order to provide notice rather than simply stopping.
- Last year the CF target for answering calls was reduced to 85%, to reflect the reduction in resource. Although the call centre staff were able to exceed this target for external calls, overall only 82% of all calls were answered. In total over 25,000 calls were not answered.
- In addition, Customer First staff were responsible for responding to emails, logging media enquiries, responding to social media and web contacts. Online form submissions (digital transactions) had increased from 16,600 in 15/16 to 31,700 in 16/17.
- Customers who are unsure of how to access services could telephone for advice and Customer First staff work with all service managers to ensure that services could be accessed by those with greater needs such as the elderly or more vulnerable residents. It was still vital that we could support those people that really need more support.

Planning for future services

- Increasingly, the Council were asked to provide more online services and to accept documents and applications online. We needed to be able to support customers as more government services (and other associated functions) go online.
- As a significant example, next year Universal Credit (UC) would be implemented in Devon. This was only accessed on line, and MDCC staff would no longer be able to support customers with enquiries relating to UC. Hence our role would be to signpost people and help people go online. This was very much the direction of travel.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that Council be asked to look at the idea of diminishing the level of face to face services at Phoenix House to allow for one session a month to be provided at CREDITON and CULLOMPTON.

(Proposed by Cllr F W Letch and seconded by Cllr T W Snow)

33 **ANAEROBIC DIGESTION**

The Chairman had requested that Members discuss Anaerobic Digestion and considered determining terms of reference to help develop a policy framework for the Council.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The advantages and disadvantages of Anaerobic Digestion:
- Crops that were grown to feed the Digesters:
- The need for farmers to dispose of slurry in a safe way.

It was **RESOLVED** to set up a Working Group to look into Anaerobic Digestion, using the following terms of reference:

“To understand the process, science and potential impact of Anaerobic Digestion (AD) on Mid Devon as a source of renewable energy and bio fertiliser.

The remit of the study would include:

- 1 A desktop review of the process.
- 2 A review of the current regulatory framework.
- 3 A review of planning legislation relating to AD; including a correlation with waste processes/plants.
- 4 Reference site visits.
- 5 A desktop review of nuisances, environmental concerns/incidents associated with plants and ancillary activities.
- 6 A peer review from health professionals on any potential human health impact associated with AD plants and ancillary activities.

In order to inform future planning and long term land use considerations.”

Members of the Working Group to be Mrs G Doe, Mrs A R Berry, Mrs B M Hull, Mrs C Daw, T W Snow, F J Rosamond and Mrs M E Squires.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs J Roach and seconded by Cllr Mrs G Doe)

34 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Growth and Chief Executive providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2017-18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Audit Team Leader outlined the contents of the report, explaining that the report was now more closely linked to the Corporate Plan and discussion took place regarding:

- The increasing number of empty shops in Tiverton and Cullompton;
- Economic information that was provided to the Economy PDG at each meeting;
- The increase in footfall for Tiverton at the Feast of St James event;
- The number of council houses due for completion in the year;
- A request that the number of free vends be identified along with the total number of vends for car parking;
- The benefit of the free car parking periods for local traders;
- That officers be asked to investigate the potential impact on the public when dangerous equipment was in use.

Note: - Report * previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

35 **WHISTLEBLOWING 6 MONTHLY UPDATE**

The Audit Team Leader informed the Committee that there had been no cases reported since the last update.

36 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Peer Review
Cabinet Member for Environment
Ageing Well
Performance and Risk
Police Inspector
Agency Workers

(The meeting ended at 4.05 pm)

CHAIRMAN